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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: PARTY PRIMER: TOP ARMENIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive But Unclassified. Please treat accordingly.

SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (SBU) With 64 registered political parties (as of July 30, 2004) voters in Armenia suffer no lack of choice. The following parties are represented within the National Assembly (NA): the Republican Party of Armenia, Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) Dashnaktsutyun, Country of Law (Orinats Yerkir), People's Party of Armenia, National Accord Party, Republic Party and United Labor Party. (Note: The governing coalition consists of the Republican Party of Armenia, Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) Dashnaktsutyun, and Country of Law (Orinats Yerkir). There are an additional 17 MPs in the Peoples' Deputy group that generally support the government, and 15 MPs who are not aligned with any faction or group. The remainder oppose the current government. End Note.) Other significant parties include: the National Democratic Union, Constitutional Rights Union, Social Democratic Hnchakian Party, Armenian National Movement, Liberal Democratic Ramkavar Party, Self Determination Union, Communist Party, and the Christian Democratic Party. There are several dozen other minor registered parties. End Summary.

REPUBLICAN PARTY

[1](#)3. (SBU) Founded in 1988, the Republican Party (RP) was formally registered May 14, 1991. With 40 out of 131 seats in the National Assembly, the RP has significant clout: its key figures include party chairman Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan, and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Tigran Torosian. Former Soviet-era dissident Ashot Navasardyan founded the RP in 1988. Military units formed under the Party's banner fought in the N-K war. Later the units were merged with the regular army. At the end of 1994, RP switched from being in opposition to the government to joining the Republic bloc led by the then-ruling ANM party. In 1998 RP, led by then Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, merged with the Yerkrapah Union of the Karabakh war volunteers and, a few months later, on the eve of the 1999 parliamentary elections formed the Unity bloc with the newly-established People's Party of Armenia. A pro-government party, RP formed an electoral alliance with the ARF Dashnaktsutyun and Orinats Yerkir on the eve of the 2003 parliamentary race. The electoral alliance earned a landslide victory with an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly. RP is currently considered a ruling party. It supports economic and democratic reforms and favors a strong executive branch.

Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutyun

[1](#)4. (SBU) Founded in 1890 in Tbilisi by Armenian nationalist and socialist revolutionaries who operated in the Caucasus and Western Armenia, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutyun (ARF) was first registered in Armenia July 2, 1991. The party was subsequently banned December 28, 1994, but the GOAM lifted the ban in 1998 (citing changed political circumstances). Key figures include Hrant Margarian, Vahan Hovhannisian, Armen Rustamian, Levon Mkrtchian, and Aghvan Vardanian. The ARF operates two newspapers, "Yerkir" (Country) and "Hayots Ashkharh" (The Armenian World). ARF controls 11 out of 131 seats in the National Assembly.

15. (SBU) The ARF-Dashnaktsutyun has been the most popular "traditional" party and the most active political force in the Armenian Diaspora. The Dashnak Party ruled the first Armenian Republic of 1918. In 1920, it ceded power to the Communist Party. Many Dashnaks fled Armenia, while others were repressed. The Dashnak Party was banned in Armenia during the Soviet period. The growth of glasnost during the last few years of the USSR allowed the Dashnaks to reestablish themselves in Armenia in 1988. Nevertheless, the main ruling body of the party, the Bureau, remains in Athens, Greece. From the outset, the Dashnak Party was the major opposition force to the Armenian government in power. On December 28, 1994, President Ter-Petrosian banned the party by decree. He accused the party of criminal activities, drug trafficking, assassinations, and fostering of terrorist groups (the so-called "Dro" clandestine organization.) The President's decree was followed by a decision of the Supreme Court to suspend the Party in January 1995 since it did not comply with the country's laws banning party membership of non-Armenian citizens. Several ARF leaders spent several years in jail. After LTP's resignation in February 1998, then acting president Kocharian released ARF leaders due to the "changed political situation." ARF is currently a pro-government party.

16. (SBU) The Dashnak Party is a socialist-nationalist party. It sees its ultimate goal as pursuing "The Armenian Cause," worldwide recognition of the Armenian genocide, and integration of Western and Eastern Armenia into one powerful state. Traditionally, party activities have not been transparent. In the course of its history, the party carried out a number of "revenge acts" against Turkish diplomats and other citizens. The ARF supports the independent status of Karabakh and any decision to promote its independence. Members of the ARF fought actively in the Karabakh conflict and the party had its own military units. Later, when Karabakh and Armenia formed regular armies, some of the Dashnak units merged with the armies, others were disarmed. The ARF remains a major political force in the Armenian Diaspora, and retains a wide support base in Armenia, especially among the youth.

COUNTRY OF LAW (ORINATS YERKIR)

17. (SBU) The Orinats Yerkir Party (Country of Law) (OY) was founded in 1998 under the direction of its Chairman, Speaker of the National Assembly Arthur Baghdasarian, and holds 20 out of 131 seats in the NA. Established on the eve of the 1999 parliamentary elections, OY appeared to have the support of then-Minister of National Security and Interior Serzh Sargsian. A new player on the Armenian political arena, OY nevertheless overcame the 5 percent threshold at the 1999 parliamentary elections and ended up having 5 seats in the parliament. Four years later OY impressively expanded its parliamentary group to 20 members with its chairman Baghdasarian elected as a NA speaker.

18. (SBU) A right-centrist party, OY emphasizes legislative activities and is responsible for more than 30 percent of all drafts submitted to the parliament in 1999-2003. OY is one of the few parties with a well-organized structure and strong regional branches. During the 2003 parliamentary electoral campaign OY made "generous" -- and quite unrealistic -- promises to increase salaries and return Soviet-era savings -- a move that added to OY's reputation as a "bunch of populists." Currently, OY is trying to push some of these highly controversial drafts through the parliament.

PEOPLE'S PARTY OF ARMENIA

19. (SBU) The People's Party of Armenia (PPA) was founded in 1999. It holds 5 of the 14 seats controlled by the Justice Bloc in the National Assembly (out of 131 total). Founded by the former First Secretary of the Armenian Communist Party, charismatic Karen Demirchian, the PPA unites the so-called "red directors" and former Soviet nomenclatura, as well as people opposed to Robert Kocharian. Demirchian's son, Stepan, inherited the party after the October 27 assassinations; thus far, however, he has not demonstrated his father's charisma, maturity or experience. Ideologically,

the PPA is a right-centrist party; most of its energy, however, has been spent on an anti-Kocharian campaign. (Note: The leadership of the PPA remains strongly convinced that Kocharian was involved in the October 27, 1999 assassinations. End Note.) In 2001 there was a mass exodus from the PPA rumored to be initiated by the President's office. As a result, the PPA lost all of its key positions in the National Assembly.

10. (SBU) According to official Central Election Commission results of the second round of the 2003 presidential elections, Demirchian received 32.48 percent of votes vice 67.52 percent received by President Kocharian. The opposition parties claim election fraud and falsification; the election results were disputed at the Constitutional Court. While the Constitutional Court's final ruling upheld Kocharian's victory, the court suggested holding a vote of confidence for Kocharian in order to confirm his legitimacy. Although later the Court withdrew its suggestion, claiming there was no more need for such a vote, this controversial statement triggered a round of debates in the parliament that resulted in the opposition boycotting NA sessions.

NATIONAL ACCORD

11. (SBU) The National Accord party (also known as "National Unity" party) was founded in 1997. National Accord is a right-centrist party built around its leader, Artashes Geghamian. Currently the party has 8 of 131 seats in the parliament. A former Soviet apparatchik, Geghamian became popular through his anti-Kocharian populist speeches. After the parliamentary killings in 1999 Geghamian supported President Kocharian and allegedly hoped (in vain) to be appointed Prime Minister. Since then Geghamian has been one of the harshest critics of the current regime.

12. (SBU) Following complicated negotiations, the party refused to become a part of the Justice bloc during the 2003 parliamentary elections. In the beginning of 2004, however, the National Accord faction, along with the Justice Block deputies, decided to boycott the National Assembly sessions. Some sources report that the party is financed from Russia, others note that the party is financed by former N-K "Defense Minister" Samvel Babayan (especially for the 1999 parliamentary elections).

REPUBLIC PARTY

13. (SBU) Founded in 2001, the Republic Party (RP) has 2 of the 14 Justice Bloc seats in the National Assembly, and is led by co-chairmen Aram Sargsyan and Albert Bazeyan. The RP was originally established as an opposition party by a group of former government officials that include ex-Prime Minister Sargsyan, ex-Mayor of Yerevan Bazeyan, ex-Defense Minister Harutyunian, ex-Minister of Tax Minister Ayyazian, ex-deputy Health Minister Zeynalyan, etc. They have opposed the current authorities starting after the October 27, 1999 parliamentary assassinations; their current relations with the government are deeply antagonistic. The RP never dropped its allegations claiming that President Kocharian was directly involved in the October 27 events and has strongly criticized the authorities for a "biased and incomplete" investigation of the October 27 criminal case. Most of the RP founding members split from the Republican Party citing "opportunism" and collaboration with Kocharian in 1999-2000; they established the RP with essentially one goal in mind, to oust Kocharian.

14. (SBU) The RP strongly supported Stepan Demirchian during the 2003 presidential elections and formed an election Justice bloc with the People's Party of Armenia on the eve of the 2003 National Assembly (NA) elections. The Justice Bloc's election performance was disappointing for its members: the bloc garnered only 14 seats. In parliament, the RP actively pushed for a referendum on a presidential vote of confidence; the pro-government majority, however, torpedoed the referendum vote and since then the RP, together with other opposition members, has been boycotting the NA sessions and claimed they would move the anti-Kocharian campaign from parliament to the streets. In addition, the RP is currently considering

replacing Demirchian with Aram Sargsyan due to what the party leadership perceives as Demirchian's lack of resourcefulness.

UNITED LABOR PARTY

15. (SBU) The United Labor Party (ULP) was founded in 2002, and is led by its chairman Guren Arsenian and Levon Poghosian. The ULP holds 6 out of 131 seats in the National Assembly. The ULP was founded on the eve of the 2003 parliamentary elections by a group of wealthy businessmen and entrepreneurs. A new player on the Armenian political arena, the ULP nevertheless overcame (following substantial financial outlays) the 5 percent parliamentary threshold and received 6 seats in the National Assembly. The ULP is a pro-government party that strongly supports free market reforms and establishment of rule of law society. In the National Assembly, the ULP pushes for comprehensive economic legislation aimed at encouraging Armenian exports, small and medium-sized businesses, and investments. The ULP shows less interest, however, in "pure politics;" the only strong and critical statement that the ULP has made thus far was during politically charged debates on the controversial (and eventually failed) draft amendments to the law on military service in the parliament. (Note: ULP Chairman Arsenian is a father of two sons. End Note.)

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC UNION

16. (SBU) The National Democratic Union (NDU) was founded in 1991 and registered March 19, 1992. Under the leadership of its chairman Vazgen Manukian, the NDU has 1 seat out of 131 in the National Assembly. The NDU is one of the most active, albeit small, opposition parties. Its leader, Vazgen Manukian, was one of the founders of the Karabakh Movement, one time former prime minister, former defense minister and former close ally of former president Ter-Petrosian. The NDU is primarily a party of individuals; with neither a developed party structure nor rank-and-file organization, the NDU does not have a cohesive platform. The NDU claims that the ruling elite has betrayed the ideas of democracy and a market economy, and is leading the country toward dictatorship. In mid-90s the NDU advocated resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) conflict by granting independent status to Karabakh in exchange for returning the occupied territories to Azerbaijan. During the past two years, however, Manukian has attached more importance to regional development in the South Caucasus, placing the N-K conflict settlement and due process of reforms in Armenia into a regional context. Most recently Manukian, as a Yerevan State University professor, was actively engaged in debates and meetings with students over the controversial bill on military service.

17. (SBU) In the mid-90s Manukian was widely seen as the only individual in Armenia who could challenge then-president Ter-Petrosian in the 1996 presidential elections. Many election observers believe that Manukian did in fact win the 1996 election. Since then, however, the NDU has significantly weakened and gone through several splits. The most recent division within the NDU in 2001 appeared to be triggered mostly by the personal ambitions of some of its leaders; the core NDU group, however, survived.

CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS UNION

18. (SBU) The Constitutional Rights Union (CRU) was registered August 19, 1991 under the leadership of Hrant Kachatrian and currently has one member in the National Assembly. An extremely small opposition party, the CRU also allegedly received significant support during the 1999 parliamentary elections from N-K "Defense Minister" Samvel Babayan. The party opposes President Kocharian.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC HNCHAK PARTY

19. (SBU) Social-Democratic Hnchak Party (SDHP) was founded in 1887 in Geneva and first registered in Armenia in 1991. There is currently no chairman (following the controversial resignation of George Hakobian in late 2003). The SDHP suspended publication of its weekly newspaper, the "Hnchak Hayastani" (Clarion of Armenia), several years ago due to financial problems. The party has no seats in the National Assembly. During the Soviet period, the party continued to function within the confines of the system. Traditionally, SDHP has been extremely hostile to Dashnaks in the Diaspora. SDHP is loosely organized without clearly specified program goals or strict hierarchy. The Armenian branch of the SDHP maintains stronger ties with a diasporan party branch in Syria than with two other traditional parties, ARF Dashnaktsutyun and Ramkavars. Since its return to Armenia in 1990, SDHP has been loyal and eager to cooperate with the authorities. In mid-90, the Hnchak party, though ideologically socialist, allied itself with the then-ruling ANM party, and strongly supported Ter-Petrosian's administration; later on they supported Robert Kocharian equally strongly. During the 2003 presidential election campaign, however, SDHP then-chairman George Hakobian joined the opposition alliance of 16 parties to support Kocharian's major rival Stepan Demirchian -- a move that caused some controversy within the party.

ARMENIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

20. (SBU) The Armenian National Movement (ANM) was founded in 1989 by former President Ter-Petrosyan along with other members of the "Karabakh Committee." The long-time "party of power," it has seen its influence dwindle since Kocharian has been president. The ANM favors a market economy, good relations with Turkey and a negotiated settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Initially anti-Russian, the ANM more recently acknowledged the need for a "special relationship" with Russia.

DEMOCRATIC-LIBERAL PARTY (RAMKAVAR)

21. (SBU) The Democratic-Liberal Party (Ramkavar) was founded in 1921 in Istanbul following the unification of the Ramkavar (Democratic) and Azatagan (Liberal) parties; the party was registered in Armenia June 10, 1991. Led by party chairman and National Assembly member Harutyun Karapetian, other key figures include the editor of the party's daily newspaper "Azg" (Nation) Hakob Avedikyan and the Tekeyan Society chairman Ruben Mirzakhaniyan. In addition to "Azg" the party also has a weekly "Djayn Ramkavarats" (Voice of the Democrats) in Gyumri.

22. (SBU) Ramkavar Party is one of the old, so-called traditional Armenian parties. During the Soviet period, it was active in the Armenian Diaspora throughout the world and played, along with ARF Dashnaktsutyun, a major role in preserving the Armenian Diaspora from assimilation. Nevertheless, the Ramkavar and Dashnak parties have been traditionally hostile toward each other. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ramkavars restored their operations in Armenia. The Ramkavar Party of Armenia is technically distinct from its organization in the Armenian Diaspora; in practice, however, it coordinates closely with its headquarters abroad. The Ramkavars stand for democracy, liberalism, and a free market economy and champion working through the system as opposed to revolutionary activities. Ramkavars pursue centrist policies and do not ally themselves with other parties, since, as Ramkavars assert, they are all tainted with a revolutionary zeal for usurping power. The party supports Armenia's integration into the world economy. It perceives the middle and wealthy classes as the core of its party.

SELF-DETERMINATION UNION

23. (SBU) The Self-Determination Union is a marginal opposition party. Founded in 1987 and registered July 29, 1991, the party opposes increased Russian and other foreign influence. Its leader, U.S. legal permanent resident Paruyr Hayrikian, was born in Yerevan in 1949. Hayrikian joined the underground United National Party in the late 1960s and was

arrested in 1969. Hayrikian spent 17 years in the KGB prison on charges of political dissent. In 1988, he was stripped of his Soviet citizenship and exiled to Ethiopia before moving to the U.S. Hayrikian returned to Armenia in 1990, was elected to the Parliament and served two terms (1990 and 1995). Hayrikian ran for the 1991 presidential election as Chairman of the Self-Determination Union, a right-center nationalistic party, and received 8 percent of the vote (Ter-Petrosian received 83 percent). During the 1996 presidential election campaign Hayrikian joined the opposition alliance and supported their joint candidate Vazgen Manukian. During the 1998 Presidential election, Hayrikian received 5.4 percent of the vote and chose to support Robert Kocharian for the run-off. After Kocharian's election as President, Hayrikian was appointed Adviser to the President, Chairman of the Presidential Human Rights Committee, and Chairman of Constitutional Amendments Committee. He resigned a few years later. Hayrikian and his party have moved away from their earlier pro-government stance and now oppose the President.

COMMUNIST PARTY

124. (SBU) The Communist Party (CP) was formally registered July 29, 1991, as the successor of the Armenian branch of the Communist Party of the USSR. With fewer than 50,000 members country-wide (most of them quite elderly), the Communist Party is no longer especially influential. The party favors close political and economic ties with Russia, at one point going so far as to call for a "confederation," along with the Russia-Belarus union, to include Nagorno-Karabakh. In the past the Communist Party has criticized post-independence GOAM economic reforms, calling today's Armenia "a nation of shopkeepers."

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

125. (SBU) Former Prime Minister and former Speaker of the National Assembly Khosrov Harutyunian leads the Christian Democratic Party (CDP), founded in 1991. The party is a marginal left-centrist party that professes to a mix of liberal political philosophy and Christian values. It currently has no seats in parliament. One of the few Armenian parties with a woman in a leadership position, the CDP was chaired by Ida Martirosian until three years ago; she remains active in party affairs.

NEW TIMES PARTY

126. (SBU) The New Times Party was founded in February 2004 by Aram Karepetyan. Although the New Times Party is only recently established, it is an important player among small opposition parties in Armenia. A formal member of the opposition Justice bloc, the party nonetheless maintains its own agenda distinct from its membership in the coalition. During the opposition rallies that followed the 2003 presidential elections, the party's chairman Aram Karapetyan commanded some of the largest audiences. The party's economic theories and a strong pro-Russian bias are unique among current political groups.
ORDWAY